

# THE CANADIAN THEOSOPHIST

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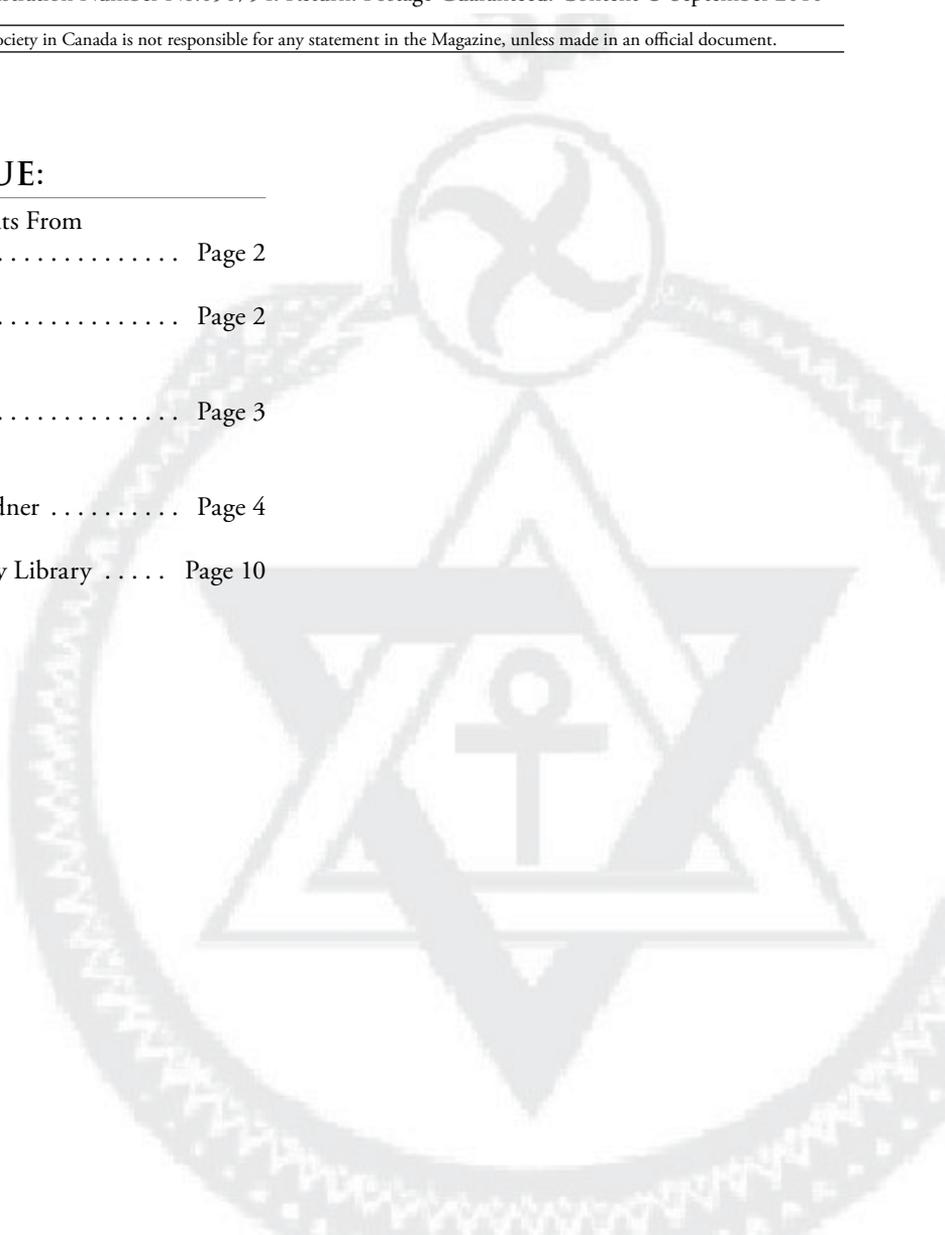
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# NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

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This issue is dedicated to Carl Emmanuel who passed away peacefully Sunday September 25th at age 73, beloved husband of Doreen, father of Damon, Stella, Christopher, Teresa, Brendon & Marisa. Grandfather to Nicole, Justin, Natalie, Neal, Victoria & Alexander. He lectured & counselled at the Theosophical society for 25 years, became president and was ordained in the universal Gnostic church; appointed Saffragan Bishop. Carl will be missed.

This magazine will be published four times a year and will include essays and thoughts and debates from and for the membership. In this issue will find reflections and comments from our President, David Gardner, the list of our newly appointed and elector officers and an insightful essay by Dr. Gardner entitled *Our Gnostic Heritage*. We have also included information about the theosophical Society Library, located on Dupont Street and available to all our members.

A publication of this kind cannot exist without your support, so we welcome all editorial suggestions and seek contributing editors for essays on a wide range of theosophical themes. And, in the true spirit of dialogue and debate we look forward to letters to the editor, comments, and suggestions for the content and themes of this journal.

This publication will be distributed by mail to members and subscribers. We are currently discussing the possibility of creating a digital edition of the journal and making it available on-line, through e-mail in a PDF format - the details of which will be announced in our next issue in November.

Enjoy Dr. Gardner's work and we look forward to hearing from all of you.

— Paul Joseph Carroll

## OBJECTS:

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*To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.*

*To encourage the Study of Comparative religion, Philosophy and Science.*

*To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.*



# NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Our understanding of the human brain is rapidly evolving. We now know that even in adults the brain is not static, but is modified by thought and experience. The term neuroplasticity is now in vogue. A recent study found that in participants who meditated for half an hour daily for eight weeks there was a thickening of the neocortex and improvement in mental functioning. Another study found that a daily walk of about half an hour reduced the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease by 50%. Still other studies have shown that exposure to classical music improves academic performance and behaviour in schoolchildren. These effects are even observed in animals. Cows who listened to Mozart were more contented and gave more milk. However, when they were exposed to a group called "Sting" they mooed their disapproval. Such reports as these have important implications for the education system as well as for life in general.

As students of theosophy, we need to realize that acquiring an intellectual understanding of the teachings is only the first step and is not sufficient. Unless the principles are put into practice, we have gained almost nothing worthwhile. We learn by doing. Today we have a lot of what may be called text-. book students. In practice, there develops a "disconnect" between what they know intellectually and their behaviour. This is even more evident amongst religious believers who, on the one hand, claim to believe in a God of Love, yet will kill their neighbour who holds other beliefs, and fail to notice the contradiction between their viewpoints. A grotesquely humorous example from the mid 90's may be cited. TV evangelist Benny Hinn, whose ethics were being questioned at the time declared, "I wish I had a Holy Ghost machine gun to mow down my enemies." Did

he not read in his Bible, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you?" A contemporary example is reported from Pakistan. People who call Islam "the most beautiful religion" are simultaneously advocating the murder of their Christian neighbours, some of whom are converting to Islam to avoid persecution. Of course, such people are not representative of Islam as it was intended to be. We cannot acquire self-knowledge by reading books or by attending classes or seminars, however well presented they may be. They may stimulate our interest and offer techniques which, if applied, will help us in realizing our goal, but when we do apply what we have learned we have wasted our time and money.

Our behaviour will improve only if we raise our level of consciousness and that means contacting our higher selves and benefiting from its wisdom. Once we realize our interconnectedness and interdependence we will create the state of brotherhood we advocate.

Some years ago Toronto Lodge was privileged to enjoy a weekend seminar led by Joy Mills. Last year Joy celebrated her 90th birthday and 70 years as a theosophist. She is still active and has just published her latest book "Reflections of Ageless Wisdom." We congratulate her on her achievements and send her our very best wishes.

I would again like to ask our members to contribute articles or letters to the magazine or to let us know what topics interest you. Many Theosophical magazines consist largely of reprints of past articles. While this may be useful for new students we prefer to print original material as much as possible. In this way, we maintain theosophy as a living tradition, relevant to life as it is lived today. *TS*

# OUR GNOSTIC HERITAGE

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The religious and philosophical ideas we experience today have a long history. One tradition very important to us originated in a number of groups that we now call the Gnostics. Our knowledge of what they taught formerly came to us through the distorted lenses of their enemies, but since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library, they have been able to speak to us in their own voice.

What follows is divided into two parts. The first part will be largely historical and only a summary thereof at that. Part two will consider primary teachings of the Gnostics and their theosophical relevance.

Gnosticism was not something entirely new. It evolved from prior long traditions. The earliest of these traditions of which we have any definite knowledge is associated with a race we know as the pygmies. The tradition is at least 12000 years old, if not much older still. From their descendants today we know that they developed two principal myths. The first corresponds exactly with the Jesus myth. Among others the Egyptians were heirs to this tradition. Thus, for instance, there are four large murals on the walls of the temple at Luxor which depict four scenes we recognize from the nativity narrative in the Bible. These murals were painted around the year 1700 BCE.

Eventually, there developed what came to be known as the Osiris-Dionysus myth. This was the story of the pagan god and which was known under many names such as Taminuz, Serapis, etc. When these myths are compared they share many elements in common, as well as with the Jesus story. Because they were known to be myths and not history, they could be modified slightly as they passed from nation

to nation. In practice, they were initiatic and were divided into outer and inner mysteries, the latter being reserved for the few who were deemed worthy.

The Jews did not have a tradition of this nature. However, after the time of Alexander the Great, the Greeks first made contact with the Jews. Many of the Jews went to the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria where most became Hellenized. They spoke Greek rather than Hebrew and they adopted many of the Greek customs, including attending the gymnasium. Eventually they needed a translation of the Tanakh (Old Testament) into Greek. The result was what is now called the Septuagint. The Jews could not accept the pagan tradition as is, because, for them, the idea of a god that would be on the cross was utterly shameful. They did, however have the concept of a Messiah. What then ensued was a synthesis of the pagan and messiah traditions. The hero of this new recension was named Joshua who originally was a deity, not a historical character. In Greek, this became Jesaur, from which we derive our name Jesus. The Greek form was created to satisfy the demands of gematria. In Greek, as in Hebrew, each letter of the alphabet is assigned a numerical value. The word Jesaur was constructed in order that the sum of the numerical values of the letters would equal 888. Thus, a Jewish version of the ancient mysteries was created and spread from Alexandria to their lands. We can say, therefore, that what ultimately became the Christianity we know had its first birthplace in Alexandria. As will be made evident later, it was to have a second birthplace in Rome. What must be emphasized is the fact that Christianity was initially Gnostic. The literalist form we know today did not come into prominence until the middle of the second century, CE,

about the time of Justus Martyr. The claim that Gnosticism was a heretical deviation from “pure” Christianity is false; presently the opposite is true. In creating the Jesus myth, the Gnostics set the story in Galilee, which at that time was almost entirely Greek speaking and was a major centre of the pagan mysteries. The Jewish writings had an historical style (for they were not history) and the works we now know as the gospels were written in the same style. The authors were anonymous and the names they now bear are unfactual. They might, somewhat humorously be named the four Mendaxes (Mendax is the Italian word for liar). It should be noted that words attributed to Jesus quote the Septuagint, not the Hebrew and they are often significantly different from one another. The authors make various errors in regard to geography and Jewish customs and some, at least, of the Gospels were likely written in Alexandria. Origen points out that many unrealistic details are contained in the Gospels that are intended to alert the reader to their non-historicity but it appears that few readers got the message. The character we know as St. Paul was a Gnostic and taught both the inner and outer mysteries. He knew nothing about a historical Jesus. There was no controversy in his day between those who asserted that all Jewish law should be obeyed and those who did not.

Paul was of the latter camp. Later, this caused a problem when literalism gained influence. It was too late to exclude Paul from the gospels so new letters were forged, most especially the so-called pastorals. Even the possibly genuine letters of Paul contain interpolations. That’s why the letters, as they now appear, contain so many contradistinctions. Paul could not have been a literalist Christian because they did not exist when he wrote.

Now, attention must be directed towards Rome.

The Roman Empire had an ambivalent attitude towards the mysteries. On the one hand, there was the obvious fascination. On the other hand, they were regarded as politically dangerous. Thus, at various times, the mysteries were proscribed heretic philosophers and initiates were killed or banished. Some Christians were martyred although the actual number was later greatly influenced by the church. When Constantine the Great became emperor, he called the council of Nicaea in CE 325. The authoritarian nature of Christianity appealed to him, although he did not actually convert until he was on his deathbed after he had committed several murders, including that of his son and his mother-in-law Faustus. The latter died in a vat of boiling oil in a bathtub.

The Christian attacks on the Gnostics grew even more intense, especially in the West, where the Gnostic influence had never been as widespread. Finally, the superior Theodosius declared that Christianity was the only religion allowed. With that, the era we know as the Dark Ages officially began and the downfall of the Roman Empire was made inevitable. Literalist Christianity had triumphed, but at what a terrible cost. The error of mistaking mythology for history resulted in the torture and murder of at least 50 million people. The malign influence extended into the 20th and 21 centuries. Adolph Hitler regarded himself as a loyal Roman Catholic and believed that he was carrying out the wishes of his church. More recently, it is worth noting that the massacre in Rwanda occurred despite the fact that 98 percent of its citizens prefer to be Christian. What does this tell us of the power of mere belief as opposed to genuine wisdom?

The foregoing has sketched only a few aspects of the history of Gnostic tradition. More detail may be found in “The Jesus Mysteries” by

Timothy Freke and Peter Gaudy as well as two sequels, "Jesus and the Lost Goddess" and "The Laughing Jesus." These works offer a concise and readable summary of the issues with many interesting situations and copious footnotes.

Now, a consideration of the principal Gnostic teachings will be offered.

The Gnostics divided human beings in to two components, the eidolon and the daemon. The eidolon consists of the body and the outer personality, the word eidolon in Greek meaning "image." The remainder of the human being is the daemon but the interpretation of this word varies with the level of initiation attained. In general, people were divided into four types. The first were called hylur? From the word hyle, meaning matter. These were the uninitiated. Next were the psychics who had attained the first initiation. Those taking the second initiation were called pneumatics and those of the third degree were the mystics. These four levels correspond to the current? Principles of earth, water, air and fire. To psychics, the daemon manifested as the guardian angel. To pneumatics, it was realized as the inner self. The mystics recognized the daemon as the universal self, present in all.

Correspondingly, the Jesus story was understood differently. Psychics took it literally. Pneumatics understood it mythically. The mystics had entirely transcended the need for the Jesus story or any other.

The Gnostics correctly noted that the god of the Old Testament is not that of the New Testament has been obscured by the modern translations but is quite evident when the testaments are read in their original languages. The psychotic characteristics attributed to the Old Testament deity are certainly not those we might expect of a universal deity. The Gnostics

called it the demiurge and initiates swore an oath not to have any devotion to it. The New Testament deity is not given a personal name but is simply referred to as theos, ie "the god." The Gnostic deity is not anthropomorphized but is ultimately unknowable.

In essence, we find the Gnostic concept identical with that of Hinduism wherein Atman is equated with Brahman. We are therefore advised "Know Thyself and thou shall know the universe and the gods." There are other characteristics of Gnostic groups that distinguish them from those of literalist Christians. One was their egalitarianism. There was no fixed hierarchy. Someone might be a layman at one meeting, a provost at the next, a reader at the next, and so on. This avoided the infighting that characterized literalist groups where members jostled with each other for positions of power. Women could hold any office on the same basis as the men. Literalists would not allow women in any ecclesiastical role whatsoever. In time, many churches would not permit men and women to sit together. Byzantine Christians even required women to be veiled and this was later to influence the views of Mohammed.

This anti-female bias influenced teachings also. As we now know, a large and important part of the Christian mythological cycle was deleted. This concerned the fall and redemption of the goddess Sophia. Indeed, Sophia played a more important role in the drama than did the Christ figure. Space does not permit a full recounting of the myth here. It may be found in "The Lost Goddess" by Freke and Gaudy. Christianity lost the balance between the polarities of masculine and feminine which had originated with the Jews and which went on to infect Islam with such dire consequences.

At open Gnostic meetings, anyone could attend

while the mysteries were reserved for initiates and candidates for admission. Also noteworthy is the fact that, in practice, Gnostics exhibited much higher standards of morality than literalists. In conflicts between them, the Gnostics were never the aggressors. The Valentinians attempted to reconcile the two factions, but eventually gave up the effort as futile. The difference was clearly shown in the later event called the Abbigensian Crusade which pitted the Roman Catholic Church against the Cathars. There can be no doubt as to which side exhibited the higher moral standards.

The Rosicrucians, whose traditional history has them originating during the reign of Pharaoh Thutmose III exhibited characteristics very similar to those of the Gnostics, and, like them, were also initiates. Freemasonry, as well, encourages high moral standards but unlike the Rosicrucians, limited its membership to men. Gnostics recognized that only one universal soul exists. This implies that universal brotherhood is a necessary ideal and that no individual soul personality could ever be lost. . they denied the existence of hell and endorsed the law of reincarnation. It is noteworthy that the church fathers Origen, later condemned for heresy, was trained in the mysteries and the main reason for his ostracism was precisely his view that all could eventually be saved.

Gnosticism is currently enjoying a renewal of interest. However many feel a need for it to express itself in a manner that is more in tune with modern culture. Gnostic texts are very hard for lay persons to read and understand because they are expressed in a language of a culture that is now extinct. No tradition can truly survive and thrive if it remains stuck in the past and refuses to acknowledge the advances in human knowledge. This is why Judaism, Christianity and Islam are now, in reality, just

fossilized relics. Religions do not evolve, they merely degenerate, as H.P.Blavatsky noted.

The parallels between Gnostic teachings and those of modern theosophy are quite evident. Also evident is that the need for ideals in the modern world is urgent, especially because that world seems bent on regressing an infantile past. *TS*

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Three Rivers Press, New York

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS AND CONTRIBUTORS

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A publication of this kind cannot exist without your support, so we welcome all editorial suggestions and seek contributing editors for essays on a wide range of theosophical themes. And, in the true spirit of dialogue and debate we look forward to letters to the editor, comments, and suggestions for the content and themes of this journal.

Letters intended for publication should be restricted to no more than 500 words. The editor reserves the right to shorten any letter unless the writer states that it must be published in full or not at all. The editor will contact the writer prior to publication date - please include a phone number and or email address with all correspondence.

## LIBRARY RESOURCES

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The Library of the Toronto Theosophical Society is available to members of the Theosophical Society and it is a collection of books about Theosophy as well as many books from the world's numerous great religions, philosophies, and systems of thought. With books collected over the course of a century, our library is an excellent reference for those interested in studying these systems of thought.

The library is open to the general public for browsing during the following times:

### LIBRARY HOURS:

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*Tuesdays 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm*

*Saturdays 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm*

Book loans are free to members of the society. However, the general public is free to read and study within our library during library hours. Contact us to find out how to become a member and for location information.

### LIBRARY BORROWING PROCEDURE:

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To join the Library a subscription of \$15.00 is required and annually thereafter.

A maximum of 3 books may be borrowed for a period of 1 month.

Library Hours - Tuesday 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm and Saturday 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

For more details go to the website:  
<http://toronto-theosophy.org/library.html>

### SUGGESTED READING

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*Freemasonry and its ancient mystic rite*  
C.W. Leadbeater

*Science and Occultism*  
I.K. Taimni